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What one gives away one strangely has.
Reading between his lines you feel precise
and formidable intelligence working hard
to efface itself in genial embrace
of the frivolous. Scorning the deadend
hobbies of intellectuals like art,
science, politics and such. He wants the real
to bite down on, mind-chew, something
fierce. You could hear the italics,
and how much he liked the sound of that,
instead of the usual piggy snuffling
in the library a huge tiger. A tiger.
Hard to be indifferent to one of those.
Enough to see it, that creamsicle pelt
and bloody fangs, gazing green at you
from the underbrush where your native
bearer's mangled bones already
attracts squadrons of afreets – they too
are scared of that rigorous musculature,
the animal, patient, willing to kill
as many as you bring along to him,
his all-purpose, unprejudiced, efficacious teeth.

23 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

WHAT IS MISSING FROM THIS PICTURE

Can one eliminate a brother from the story? I notice with dismay this morning that in all my haberdashery of texts and excuses no man at all has a sister. What does that tell the curious? Aux armes, critics! No sib, no Abel, a name the lexicon suggests means vain or empty. Just Cain, me, alone: a name that means strong, enduring, upright even, like a trombone, a column of red sandstone in the desert, inscribed closely in an unknown language. Cain alone, cruising the terraces of Provence, waiting my turn for glamorous suicide. Semi-ology: study of the mark upon Cain's forehead. Every human is protected by his own sign. Totem. Told him off in wilderness wrong side of Eden, where art is born, and crafts and music and limping poetry, shaded by the shrubbery along Tigris. Signs: man, learn this stuff. It will make everybody want to love you, to hold your tongue in their honest mouths. You, Byronic honeybunch, Teslated geek, Beethovenish grumpster, all Cain's guises, poor dead Keats. Not a sister in sight at least.

24 June 2007, Cuttyhunk

HILL

What do you do
when you get
to the top. Now

what. You
 have found
the entrance
do you go in.
Do you dare.
The road is blue.
Everything is down.

24 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

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It's nice to live at the top for a change
and watch the weather struggle up the road
lured by blackbirds, they make it look so easy.
The ospreys swoop close overhead,
the miracle of a door bangs in the sea breeze.
Start now. Everything was waiting for you
forever. You chose your own mother,
endured the rest of her choices. You chose
only the hill. The adversity to climb.
You keep having these weird dreams
of being somebody else living your life,
messing up your furniture, being scared
of your wife. Meaning anything
is a fool's game anyhow, interpretation
is the last ditch effort of the God in you
to make sense of what He's made,
as if a dream is a kind of scalpel or a rose
the vernicle that stanchd your wound.
Everything does it. You can almost forgive
drunkenness and basketball, almost consent
to do a lot of things that people do.
When the day comes you go south in winter
you'll know that interpretation is no more.
Wisdom is wasted on retirees. Eat fast,
even the blueberry muffins are soon gone.

24 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

VACANCES

To know so much
and just want to look at the sea.
Listen serene
to some child crying,
young sparrows chirping for their chow.
Hear the grass grow.
Smile at the horrible dog.

24 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

ALIARUM CORPORA

Other than what. Whom. Who
are these persons who have lips,
who possess personalities that feel like names
I dream of they recur,
cameo appearances in genial nightmares,
I wake up afraid of whom I've known.

Curious social life of dreamtime. Dreams
not meant for telling but forgetting
soon as I can into the tilth of mind,
let it die into what comes next, knowing only
some thing has been you don't need to know
but you are what it knew into being.

Something like that. Let the next
come next, let some living strength
struggle out of that muddy commonwealth
from which I wake baffled
reaching for a hat I never wore
licking off my lips a kiss I never kissed.

24 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

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Work on this: it's all
just sunshine on the beach.
Pebbles. Intensities.
Luminous detachment.
I have used all the words up
and sun's still warm on the back of my hands.

*

I have told my whole life
and never told their names.

*

In summer islands nice
dogs follow people.
Who do people follow?
Are they no different from cloud?

24 June 2007

MOEURS CONTEMPORAINS

It's never now. Have you ever noticed?
The fact that this is a conversation
does not imply somebody's actually there.
Either end of us might be missing –
permanently, as when one falls off a cliff
or is pushed, or less radically, say,
just gone to Philadelphia to see Duchamp.

And stands there at the knothole squinting
into the exhausted thrill of someone
else's naked mind, complete with gas light
little flame in memory of all the fallen
in the wars of art. Praxiteles. Ruskin.
Bell invented the telephone but who
invented the thing in our pockets we
actually use? Sunrise over the moors
o ease my questioning. Who invented
the language we mutter into it?

And why is algebra like a bicycle,
I used to know. I thought it would be
both exciting and honest to expose
my radical frivolity, then suddenly
it seemed a permanent mindset
and what does that imply? Celebrated
for my attitude, I just sit on the deck
and the intellectual tourists jog by
each waving a tentative salute that I
often good-humoredly return. Fame!

It's not all bad. The primary colors
are a little brighter now, now lime-green
is off the menu. Somewhere, in some gallery,
is the knot from the knothole Duchamp
punched out or the sawdust left when he
simulated a natural vacancy, sly boots.

Even the hole is one more fabrication
I now suspect. Just more art after all.
But as we agreed before, there is no now.

25 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

THIS QUIET MORNING I HAVE TO SHARE

with a noisy cardinal and a mourning dove
they tell me is taking over the avian biome round here—
revenge of the passenger pigeon? It should be
just me and my sunlight and my banana
and a beach stone painted with a map in yellow
of this green island where someone found it,
the stone, the birds, the idea. Or is it some
other planet where the sea is made of stone
and the land is a quaggy place where no one
sleeps easy? When I was green, like the banana,
just the bird and sea and me, but then
those dreaded polysyllables butt in: other
people. travelers, cloud inspectors, fishermen.
So I abandon the whole project to them.
Let them build 7:30 out of plywood, carve
Monday out of sea foam and sunlight.
I've done my job, opened the windows,
even opened the door, smiled at the rabbit,
frowned at the neighbor's little boy.

25 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

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Everything depends on the weather.
My state of mind especially,
from which my Fate emerges
with everything else, stately
as a hanging judge swaggering
into the courtroom, weeping
over his propensity to kill.

25 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

AN HONEST HAT

Heartfelt insincerity yet
a disgust with innovation
for its own sake. Nicely
dressed, adverbial haberdashery.
Gents' suiting. For whose
sake should we all be? Gosh!
You're asking a lot from your
binoculars. Telephoto compresses,
telegrams are obsolete though
the distance is still there
but nobody notices it now.
We get to walk as far as the neck
then everything is private.
Turn back. Be a common witness.

25 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

THINGS TO PACK

My spotty collection of Patristics
—good on the Gregories, poor on the rest
though I have a soft spot for Origen.
Sunshine. A box of 5000 staples
in case I meet some sunset on the cliff
a pale romantic with a stapler in her hand.
A sheaf of rose leaves. One thorn
wrapped in waxed paper. Snug things
around anxious things, socks in crystal,
tide tables, that snapshot of my daughter
where she looks like Lana Turner. Who?

For the 72 hours before leaving anywhere
at all for anywhere else, foreign or
familiar, easy or risky, makes no
difference, my dreams turn frightening,
vexed. Dreams that I remember if at all
like the taste of spoiled milk
still in my mouth at waking. In daytime
my right hand, the so-called dominant
member, feels cold, even numb at times
like the hand of a man midway in
writing a suicide note I imagine. Never
have I written one of those. My own
suicides are wordless, strangely incomplete.

And I would never come right out and tell
what I thought I was up to. Never apologize,
never explain. But isn't that just what
I'm doing now, going on about sick dreams
et cetera before leaving, isn't this explaining?
No, because nobody's listening. This
is just talking when nobody's around
—it's what's called writing. I dreamt
I was in the wrong body, and all the math
was wrong – not much of a movie in that.

Yet it hurts. Uncertainty is the worst pain,
so humiliating, as a society woman would say,
to be baffled by your own mind, baffled
and irritated and bored and confused.
If it even is your own mind. Whose else

could it be? If nobody is listening, nobody's
talking into me, my head the Dixie cup
into which some bored child is mumbling
words and situations he doesn't understand?
I wake drenched with his spittle? I wonder.

26 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

MOVE THINGS BY EXPLAINING

Structure is inherently unstable.
In any given day breakfast
is a fracture zone. A clinamen.
O dearest friend I yearned for you
to experience me so I could learn
myself in that exchange. But a self
is a kind of simper, isn't it,
one word too many
in an otherwise faultless argument.

26 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

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Who will one day watch this mind at work?
And say how it is if it is different from play.
It needs to be studied, spoken, quietly known.
A painting of a lagoon at sunset might serve
just as well, three girls in an aluminum canoe.

26 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

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Her smile becomes
a point of light
that shrinks
without dwindling
into immensity.

26 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

OPINIO

To be for once the message
itself. To come to another,
a listening woman, ear pressed
to a lamppost. A priest
pretending to be the sunset.

How does the grass grow?
Is everything the same as it always was
only we keep losing our place in the text,
changing our minds, feeling differently
about the tulips or the Dolomites?

Is it all just thinking? We are born
between sixes and sevens
some famous saint remarked,
Original Sin, the one
without a sinner. Just the wind
hissing in some woman's ear.

26 June 2007
Cuttyhunk

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The minute you sit down the wind comes up.
Springs out of the hill behind you
and rushes into the sea. Something to do
with temperature does it, gradients,
pressure, the whole sun. The ignorance
of mortal mind. Means me.
Wind brushes the fog off, shoves it
back a little, heaps it on a neighbor island.
O charity will we ever learn love?
Even the dogs don't know what to make
of all our music when they mosey along
by the window and hear us playing Brahms?

26 June 2007
Cuttyhunk